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ABSTRACT

In this speech, the author examines and traces past and present treatment of minorities in textbooks. The issue of whether textbooks should and do adequately represent the real world of minorities is emphasized. In the past, when publishers either omitted minorities from books or made misleading statements in textbooks about minorities, textbooks did indeed represent the feeling of the real world, reflecting the discriminatory practices and social attitudes of society. Presently the treatment of minority groups in textbooks is undergoing a change toward the new concept of cultural pluralism. Although minorities are being included in textbooks now, there is a need to make sure that these are bias free. Trezise proposes three general criteria to judge the adequacy of textbooks: (1) historical facts must be interpreted fairly and in the light of current historical research, (2) the accomplishments and contributions of minorities in textbooks should be presented realistically, and (3) textbooks should convey that certain values are intrinsically a part of the American system. Textbooks should describe the real world if we accept in educational terms a premise of cultural pluralism and its implications for education. Placing information about minorities in textbooks helps the reader to deal with the total experience of man. Education and textbooks can and should be the agents of cultural change. (Author/JR)

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The Minority Group Image in Textbooks

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THE MINORITY GROUP IMAGE IN TEXTS

Ar[illegible] Stoddard

In response to the program's agenda, I would like to address my comments to the three questions from the viewpoint of a minority member.

First, do textbooks describe the real world of minorities? In the past, yes. Textbooks did describe the real world for minorities. There are several reasons why I make this statement. Textbooks did reflect the discriminatory practices and social attitudes of society. One of the favorite devices was omission of minority members from text content. Generally, material was presented from the white-Anglo-Saxon Protestant point of view. Materials did not reflect the idea of a pluralistic society. If mention of minorities was made, it was usually distorted. For example, statements such as "slaves were content with their lot" represented the perceptions of the times. The minority heroes included in the texts were approved by the dominant society and were presented with Anglo-Saxon characteristics. Many times, mention of minorities was very brief and held to one statement. Consequently, it could be interpreted as insignificant.

This was the real world for minorities. They had been unable through the years to become a full participating member of the American dream. They were kept invisible through conditions which afforded lack of opportunity in the economic, political, educational and social areas.

The omission of minorities and misleading implications remained in textbooks for several reasons. First, textbook businesses operate for

profit. Much material about minorities was excluded because school systems wanted books that avoided controversy. Even when publishers made the initial effort to print multi-ethnic texts, the sales fell short and were less in demand than the traditional or standard texts.

Second, educators did not want to admit that negative attitudes might exist on the part of those who used the materials. Textbook revisions were delayed on the argument that teachers really made the difference, not the materials. The significant element was in the way the material was handled. However, limitations of the teachers were that they had been trained with material that contained the kinds of distortions and omissions that needed correcting. Also, they usually did not include in their teaching plans anything that was not in the textbooks.

In recent years, however, efforts have been made to improve the treatment of minorities in textbooks, with primary focus on black Americans. Demands by pressure groups and the call for black studies on college and high school campuses brought educators face to face with the "cultural pluralism" in society.

Educators saw the need to upgrade the curriculum with inclusion of cultural heritage and history of minority groups. Publishers of instructional material and textbooks complied by marketing texts which would meet these demands.

Initially, books and materials presented a separate history and culture of minority groups, particularly blacks. Advocates for the separate texts saw them serving the purposes of 1) to offer minority children a more balanced picture of the American past; 2) to improve

race relations; and, 3) to improve the self-concept of minority children (Cuban, 1968).

However, rethinking on the issue took place. Such texts could be shelved, to collect dust, by persons who felt threatened by minority history. Too, implications were that these texts were supplemental and that minority history was not worthy of consideration as a part of the American experience. We had texts that were "separate and of questionable equality."

Consequently, to present children with an intellectually honest account of American society meant that "balanced versions" of history textbooks were necessary. Some versions of the texts segregated in their integration. Often material about blacks was sandwiched between chapters or often tacked on at the end of the book, similarly to blacks being seated at the back of the bus in the real world. Sentences about minorities were "dropped in" - like an afterthought - a very inadequate approach.

Finally, blacks were treated as blacks first and Americans second. One example is the treatment of Federick Douglass who is usually treated as an escaped slave and black abolitionist rather than a key figure in the nineteenth century reform movements (Paynter, 1968). In the words of Benjamin Quarles, to write textbooks treating minorities solely as a part of an undifferentiated mass is to denigrate those groups.

Today, do textbooks describe the real world of minorities any better. The answer is yes and no. There have bben some efforts to change. Minorities are being included in textbooks. While we cannot assume that these new materials are completely bias free and entirely

acceptabel, children can look at some textbooks and feel a part of American culture.

Trezise (1969) proposes three general criteria to judge the adequacy of textbooks. First, historical facts must be interpreted fairly and in the light of current historical research. Furthermore, interpretations should be in keeping with perceptions, attitudes, and concerns of the times. Textbooks today are interpreting facts more fairly and are using revisionist material. They are treating minorities more favorably and have tried to address the concerns of the times. Second, textbooks should present realistically the accomplishments and contributions of minorities in the past and today. Although texts tend to include coverage of outstanding black contributors, in many instances, minor persons are being substituted for blacks who made concrete contributions to America's progress. It appears that this is an attempt to present "new" facts about blacks before any other text does.

Third, textbooks should convey that certain values are intrinsically a part of the American system - these values being a belief in the dignity and worth of the individual, justice and equality of opportunity, and that the pluralistic nature of our society is rscognized as good and worthy of perpetuation. Few textbooks do present these values, but most texts still fail to take a stand on moral issues which concern minority groups. The serious charge against today's texts is that many of them lack a discussion of the struggle minorities have had against overwhelming social forces that have opposed their freedom, human rights, and equality of opportunity. These social forces were the real world for minority group members. However, in texts, it was smoothed over and mushed into a bland diet for students.

Should textbooks describe the real world? Yes - if we accept in educational terms a premise of cultural pluralism and its implications for education. Textbooks, the major tool of instruction in our schools today, must participate in and help prepare youth for a culturally pluralistic life and society. Students need to understand themselves and the world in which they live. To describe the real world for minorities is not too far-fetched. Placing information about minorities in textbooks helps the reader to deal with the total experience of man. The plight of the masses of minority people should not be ignored.

The request for inclusion of minorities in textbooks is legitimate. Students not only see and understand their own culture, but others are made aware of cultural differences and similarities in our society. When the dominant group studies and understands minority culture, they may perceive the group with more understanding and tolerance.

Banks (1971) states that studies about other cultures should "help students to make intelligent decisions so that they can resolve personal problems and through social action, influence public policy and develop a sense of political efficacy." Is this a goal for just minority students, or is it a general goal for all students? I suspect that we all want our children to make intelligent decisions and carry out the actions suggested by Banks.

In a recent article (Keach & Williams, 1975), the question was asked "Do we want to expose very young children to the prejudices and racism found in American society?" Each passing day, members of the dominant society are using derogatory descriptive phrases to depict minority members to children. Minority members are still being stereo-

typed. Minority children are still being considered inferior in many situations. How can textbooks expose them to the real world - any more than what they experience each day? What textbooks need to do is to make some effort to counterbalance some of the daily experience of children. What textbooks need to do is to present material realistically enough so that children can make decisions for themselves about cultural differences and grow in acceptance of others. According to Drachler (1974), awareness of and sensitivity to cultural pluralism are of cardinal importance, from the standpoint of sound pedagogy. Group conflicts need to be resolved so that we can get on about the business of building American into a model nation. Textbooks can help accomplish this end through the role of "social change agent" regardless of how meager we think that role is.

Shane and Shane (1974), in discussing future oriented education believe that education must be an agent of cultural change. And textbooks play a dominant role in this educational process. Even though we realize that textbooks cannot do the job alone or be held entirely responsible for the implementation of social change for the future, they can present the kind of world to be sought in the future - a real world. Textbooks can create a "climate" with which the child can identify as the "real world." What kind of real world do we want in the future - one continually filled with bigotry, social injustices and racial hate? Or do we want a real world that represents the basic American values and beliefs? Textbooks help to shape these images - one way or the other, with the manner in which they present material, the manner in which they emphasize human relationships, and whether

they take a moral stand on pertinent issues.

Can textbooks describe the real world? Perhaps the questions is better phrased in the words of Bruce Joyce (1969) - is society actually ready for realistic textbooks? Students who have developed some competencies in some intellectual skills, for example, in analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating, are able to deal with more vivid details than perhaps the younger child. We do not expect children to have to plow through volume after volume to grasp a generalization about the real world. Through carefully selected content and pictures which represent a broad scope of American life, textbooks can help children develop the ability to perceive the world as it really is. Minorities cannot and must not be excluded. It is important that students be reminded that contributions to America's growth were made by both the dominant group and by members of minority groups.

Joyce further suggests that textbooks for the younger child can be so constructed to teach them about human interaction and how to use the strategies of social science to analyze human behavior. It is essential for youngsters to develop this skill, for families flee to suburbia to escape the real world, to protect their children from an environment in which they will have to compete and survive (Hogg & McComb, 1969). Families who remain in inner-city environments will also produce children who will be handicapped in the "real world." Textbooks, with assistance from teachers, can help prevent a thwarted view of the real world and help promote educational pluralism that we so desperately need.

Admittedly, social change is occurring everyday - and there is a growing need that we acknowledge a necessity to relearn continually

about the real world. If we are resolved to the general goals of education and the fundamental beliefs of our country, textbooks need to assist in accomplishing these ends. This process can only be done through mutli-ethnic textbooks, therefore, making them representative of our true American culture.

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